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USHERS.

A LITTLE BOOK ABOUT USHERS.

BY

FREDERICK FEEDER, B.A.,

“Declamare doces? O ferrea pectora Vetti!”
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PREFACE AND DEDICATION.

It is well known that it takes nine tailors to make a man. If we substitute for tailors, Ushers, we have never yet been informed how many of the latter would be required to satisfy the equation. In other words, the modern Usher, *quâ* Usher, is practically ignored. Food, dormitories, school hours, cubic space are all subjects of anxious inquiry: the Usher is a chattel whose presence or absence in a school seems to be quite disregarded by the parental world.

If the Author could make sure of securing one parent as a reader, and of

convincing him or her (1) of the existence of the Usher, and (2) of his importance as a factor in school life, his jealousy for the honour of his profession would be in a measure satisfied.

For the rest, he can only hope to number as his readers those who are most specially interested in the matter, the Ushers themselves.

To all Ushers, therefore, past, present, or to come, from Oliver Goldsmith and Eugene Aram down to the very last recruit who has enrolled, or hereafter shall enrol himself, in the ranks of this noble army, this little book is respectfully dedicated by

ONE OF THEM.

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A Little Book about Ushers.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

“Ushers are men of learning, reputation, and assiduity.”—*Goldsmith*.



F the schoolmaster in general much has been said and sung. He is often before the public. In slack times he is invaluable to the writers of smart general articles in the daily papers, at whose hands it must be confessed that

he does not, as a rule, get fairplay. The humorous possibilities connected with his calling point many a jest: indeed he is scarcely ever spoken of seriously, but gets as many kicks, and as few halfpence, as a policeman in a pantomime. Who has not smiled at piquant allusions to Dr. Busby, to the "birchen shades of Rodwell Regis," to the inordinate length of the schoolmaster's holidays, the exorbitance of his terms; and felt a flush of indignation at the idea of schoolmasters retiring on a fortune? Turning to the comic papers we find the same spirit prevalent. Here he is always represented in one traditional type, as an elderly man of vulgar, not to say truculent appearance, with spectacles on nose, and in his hand the inevitable

cane or birch rod. He has as much resemblance to the ordinary preceptor of modern days, as the well-known representation of John Bull in the cartoons of *Punch* bears to the modern English farmer. Moreover, whereas Mr. Punch's John Bull exhibits an unvarying geniality and Pickwickian good humour, Mr. Punch's pedagogue is invariably snuffy, unpleasant, and forbidding.

In the pages of fiction again, the schoolmaster is, as a rule, made to present only his ludicrous side to the discerning public. As a fair example might be cited some of the chief characters in Mr. Austey's charming n extravaganza, "Vice Versâ." Dr. Grimstone seems to combine all the more disagreeable characteristics of Dr.

Blimber and Mr. Whackford Squeers of Dotheboys Hall ; while, for irritating incompetency and general unfitness for their profession, no one could surpass his two assistants, Messrs. Tinkler and Blinkhorn. Great as have been the changes wrought in the management and discipline of schools within the memory of living men, yet the old ideas on these subjects are still to a great extent current in the popular mind. *On a changé tout ça*—or a great deal of it; but alas! the popular ideas on the subject of schoolmasters still illustrate the truth of the old adage anent the results of giving a dog a bad name.

It is, however, to remarks on a particular class only of schoolmasters that these pages are to be devoted ;

and here it may be as well to offer a few words of explanation with regard to the subject of this tractate as set forth on its title-page. One word there employed may be liable to cause misconception in the minds of the uninitiated, though, in its special modern application, it is peculiarly appropriate to the subject hereinafter to be treated. The term "usher" then is one which has to a great extent dropped out of use as a serious appellation, though it still lingers in commercial academies, and in one at least of our larger public schools, as an official title. Times have changed indeed for the usher during the last hundred years, and there is something very startling to modern ears in Goldsmith's remarks on the subject, which

appear in the *Bee*. "Lest the ignorance of the master," says he, "be not sufficient, the child is generally consigned to the *usher*. This is generally some poor needy animal, little superior to a footman either in learning or spirit, invited to his place by an advertisement, and kept there merely from his being of a complying disposition, and making the children fond of him." And again, "Every trick is played upon the usher. The oddity of his manners, his dress, or his language is a fund of eternal ridicule. The master himself now and then cannot avoid joining in the laugh, and the poor wretch, eternally resenting this ill-usage, seems to live in a state of war with all the family. This is a very proper person, is it

not, to give children a relish for learning?"

The iron of usherhood seems to have entered into Goldsmith's soul; for he again refers to the miseries of the profession in the story of the philosophic vagabond:—George Primrose has gone to his cousin for advice on the choice of a profession, and suggests that of usher in an academy. "I have been an usher at a boarding-school myself," cries the cousin, "and may I die by an anodyne necklace, but I had rather be an under-turnkey in Newgate. I was up early and late, I was browbeat by the master, hated for my ugly face by the mistress, worried by the boys within, and never permitted to stir out to meet civility abroad. But are you fit for a school?"

Let me examine you a little." Then follows a string of questions, some of which, by allusion to "dressing the boys' hair," and "lying three in a bed," present a vivid, and probably accurate, picture of the usher's life in the last century. So much then for the usher of the good old times. But the name has of late years been revived and applied (in humorous self-depreciation) to the masters of preparatory schools, and it is of such institutions that we intend to speak.

There is an immense number of young men employed in teaching the very young idea; and though their work is very different from that of masters in public schools, they are hardly recognised as a class by themselves. Indeed, for their own part,

they seem to shrink from being so regarded, and appear to wish the world to understand that they are merely amateurs, rather, so to speak, doing it for fun than taking up this line of life as a serious profession. In the majority of cases, no doubt, this kind of teaching is undertaken merely as a stopgap : it serves, as it were, for a halting-place from whence to survey the prospect of the future, before choosing any of the great high roads to fortune, such as the Bar, the Church, or Teaching in its higher branches in the larger public schools. The transitory nature of the employment then may to a great extent explain the attitude assumed by those engaged in it.

But there is another fact connected with the profession which will also

explain much of the distaste felt and expressed by young men for work of this nature. The master in a preparatory school has not to act merely as a *master*, in the popular acceptance of the term; to the duties of teacher, guide, philosopher, and friend, must be added those of the nursemaid; and it is just this combination that with nine out of ten young men is enough to make them ashamed of their profession. The functions of nursemaid are implied in that part of the usher's duties distinguished by the comprehensive title of *supervision*, on which subject we intend more fully to dilate hereafter.

Preparatory schools are comparatively modern inventions. A boy who is intended to enter at any of the

large public schools, commonly spends his first few years of school life at a preparatory establishment, where only boys of from eight to fourteen years old are taken. The number of such schools is therefore very large, and seems to be daily increasing; while a proportionate increase seems to be taking place in the numbers of men on the look-out for masterships in them. As a consequence of the growth of preparatory schools, have sprung up various scholastic agencies. These, it may be necessary to inform the uninitiated, are institutions which undertake to supply headmasters with immaculate tutors, and tutors with blameless headmasters, not to say situations in every way little short of paradise; and this they will do for a

commission of only five per cent. on the first year's salary. The method of obtaining masterships by means of agents is as follows. The applicant is required to pay half-a-crown by way of initiation fee, and is then supplied with numberless descriptions of posts vacant, chiefly in private schools, all of which, at first sight, appear equally inviting. Since, however, many of these are of necessity as good as filled up already, and others prove on inquiry objectionable in some important respect, while for others the applicant himself is unsuitable, the number of available vacancies is somewhat cut down. With more or less delay, however, the agents are usually able to give information of some suitable post; and the expectant tutor, thus put into

communication with the "principal," if successful in his application, pays his five per cent. and enters upon his duties.

If the vacancies for tutors, as described by agents, put on the golden glow of El Dorado, what shall be said of the pearls beyond price which these gentlemen undertake to supply to headmasters in the form of tutors? An agent's list of gentlemen desirous of obtaining masterships is a really startling document. In it appear columns upon columns of would-be tutors, willing to teach the most recondite subjects—from differential calculus and Sanskrit down to "Latin (elementary)" and "English subjects" (otherwise known as reading, writing, and arithmetic), and all for the most absurdly inadequate salaries.

There is, moreover, one apparently important part of the machinery made use of for vacancy-catching, which perhaps deserves a word of comment—this is the “testimonial.” Nobody, least of all the possessor himself, in nine cases out of ten, puts any confidence in a testimonial. No man who has avoided the graver moral offences need be in want of a good one. It represents the real man, much as a portrait painted by a cunning and flattering artist resembles the possibly mean original. It is only the matter of a line here, a shading there; this good feature with the light upon it, that ill-shaped one softened down, and cleverly drawn in the shade. A man is passionate and inclined to be tyrannical—he becomes a “strict disciplin-

arian.” He is good-tempered but weak and unable to keep order—he is described as “beloved by the boys:” he is utterly unqualified to teach the subjects he professes—this trifling failing, however, is quietly passed over.

It is doubtless good-nature and a dislike to hurt the feelings or damage the prospects of another which prompts the composition of these encomia; and so long as testimonials continue to be required, they will continue to be thus laudatory. It is the old game of “πέμπει μωρὸν πρότερον” that is thus often played by headmasters, though the circumstances are somewhat altered, and it is the players themselves that are befooled. Few men believe in testimonials, either as recommendations or warnings, and yet the farce is kept

up. Nay, so far from being a help, they are often of necessity utterly misleading. Perhaps, to complete the game, it is a pity that "principals" are not required to furnish testimonials of themselves and their establishments: this would prevent the fun from being all on one side.





CHAPTER II.

OF THE VARIOUS SPECIES OF USHER.

“Public hackneys in the schooling trade.”
—*Cowper.*

IT has often been remarked that there is one thing which every man conceives himself able to do better than his neighbour, namely, poking the fire. To this, however, our experience justifies us in adding two more—first, reading poetry aloud, and, secondly, teaching. It is of course to the consideration of the latter foible only that we wish in this

place to draw attention. Probably every man starts with believing himself a teacher by nature, whether he communicates the idea to his friends or not. Teaching seems to be regarded as one of those delightful means of making money, familiar in advertisements, "for which no previous training is required." This notion, according to a man's circumstances and temperament, either becomes considerably modified by experience, or, favoured by self-confidence and success, is stereotyped as one of the firmest articles of his belief. In a few instances, no doubt, it is justified by the facts of the case, but how seldom it is so justified is abundantly proved by the plentiful scarcity of really good teachers.

We may safely say then that at

the outset the whole genus usher is animated by this inspiring idea. There are, moreover, certain other general characteristics which we may set forth before proceeding to notice the separate species. The usher in general then is distinguished by great tetchiness in small matters, and by considerable impatience of control; he is always on the *qui vive* to pounce upon anything in the shape of injustice; he is the tenderest skinned creature imaginable with regard to his "rights." He could hardly be reckoned a true Briton, according to popular ideas, if he nourished no comfortable grievance; accordingly his breast is always stored with a fine old English discontent. Let us illustrate by examples. He is, for instance, habitually

three minutes late for school, and is politely requested to be more punctual in future : here is a fine opportunity for a growl on the subject of fussiness in headmasters and the infringement of the liberty of the subject. Or, again, he is not constantly asked to dinner by his "chief," and accordingly has here a charming occasion for grumbling about the want of hospitality displayed by principals. No doubt he has hard work, and work of a peculiarly exacting nature, while it lasts ; but, to hear our usher speak of it, who would imagine that he has something like fourteen weeks of holiday—absolute freedom—in the course of the year ?

But if impatient of control, he is doubly recalcitrant in the matter of

taking good advice. The very fact of words of counsel emanating from his chief seems enough, as a rule, to make him question their truth, and often to drive him in exactly the opposite direction. He has therefore painfully to form his own experience, and, it is fair to say, as often as not, arrives at very different conclusions.

It is strange, by the way, to observe how much the same results are produced in the education of boys by methods diametrically opposed. Almost every man in charge of a school has his own pet theories and hobbies ; yet the curious equality of results may afford some amusement to the cynical, and sad reflection to those who are still interested in the unsolved conundrum —“ Where shall wisdom be found ? ”

Yet with all his faults the usher has many sterling qualities. He is, in the main, hard-working and conscientious, and, if treated with fairness and consideration, will (*credite principes!*) respond to such treatment.

Having spoken of the usher in general, it may not be uninteresting to notice one or two common types frequently recurrent among the men engaged in preparatory schools. Here is a specimen:—John Tunderboy is a fine manly young fellow, a good athlete, and a man of some mark in his “set” at the University. He was educated at a public school, and brings with him the traditions of his boyhood. Accordingly he is a strict disciplinarian, and is withal somewhat choleric. He finds his hands almost,

as it were, literally tied in respect to the most obvious means of enforcing industry and good order, and chafes at his powerlessness. He is reduced to his only available weapon—his tongue—and indulges in irony and invective—the natural result of which is unpopularity. He is conscientious in exacting work, and practically fulfils his purpose. Too proud to attempt working by love, he endeavours to rule by fear, though with very inadequate means for attaining his object; and, unless gifted with that mysterious force of character which belongs but to few, he fails. In any case he is probably disliked by his pupils for his harshness. He is fond of boys at heart, but with his temper every moment rubbed, so to speak,

the wrong way, he never succeeds in convincing them of this. They mistrust him, and will probably never bestow on him a higher encomium than, "Well, at any rate he's awfully just."

Here is another common type:—Allow me to introduce to your notice, courteous reader, William Mildmay. He starts with the same mental and physical qualifications as our first specimen, and has passed with credit through a public school, and Oxford or Cambridge; but he is gifted with a less decided temperament—misbehaviour and idleness do not represent to him personal insults. If—though such men are oftenest ignorant of it—he discovers his own weakness, it is of little use for him to assume a stern

demeanour and attempt to assert his authority by punishment. His power of doing the latter, and his practice may equal that of our friend Tunder-boy, but the urchins have found him out, and disregard him. They like him better than a man of the former type; but, when once boys have discovered their power, they must for ever use it. When small boys are collected in classes, affection alone goes for very little. With such a man as we are now describing they may not be boisterously disagreeable, but at best their conduct will resemble that of the complacent son in the parable, who, on receiving his father's command, said, "I go, sir," and went not.

The third and last specimen, long-

suffering reader, which shall be brought before you, is Thomas Hopkins—*general master*. This species comes nearer to the old idea of the usher than any. Oddly enough, he is never found young. He is usually quite elderly, with something of a history—and a London degree. He generally wears a beard, and garments of a strange and antique fashion. He writes a beautiful machine-like “hand,” is irreproachable in arithmetic, unassailable in geography: he has a smattering of most of the ’ologies, of Latin, Greek, French, German, history, English literature. He is enthusiastic in his profession; cheerful, though with apparently no prospects; a thorough believer in himself, and a favourite with the boys. But, alas! he has but little

authority, and his pompous attempts at self-assertion merely meet with quiet derision. He is worthy, hard-working, useful, amenable; but there is something wanting.

Having now noticed three of the commonest types, let us turn to a more pleasing task, and in a few sentences construct a model usher of the kind which doubtless exists somewhere, but which, alas ! has hitherto escaped our observation. The ideal usher, then, is he who is clever in school and active in the playground: he is a favourite with the boys; sufficiently familiar, yet always avoiding the giving of the proverbial inch which might lead to the taking of an ell; he never loses his temper, or reproaches a boy with stupidity; he possesses tact enough to

enable him to preserve discipline without giving offence, and exercises a pervading influence in the playground without ever making his presence irksome; in a word, he is possessed of infinite patience, infinite tact, infinite sympathy, and an unfailing flow of animal spirits. “*When found, make note of.*”





CHAPTER III.

OF THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE USHER.

Erat ob has causas summa difficultas.
Cæs., B. G., iv.

BETWEEN the majority of grown men and small boys there is a great gulf fixed. Very many of the difficulties of the usher arise from a desire or attempt on his part to bridge over this gulf.

The position of a public school master in this respect is somewhat different. A large proportion of the boys with whom he has to deal have "come," in the words of the cate-

chism, "to age," and between men and boys who are beginning to come to years of discretion, something near akin to friendship is quite possible. Boys of the age at which they are found in preparatory schools may be not unfairly described as men in a backward state of civilization, and are characterised by many of the virtues and vices of the noble savage. For instance, they are warm-hearted or bitter respectively, in their unreasoning likes and dislikes; credulous; cruel to each other, and all things over which they have power; suspicious or derisive of every new thing; liable to be touched by kindness at the moment, but fickle in their remembrance of it; inclined to deceit and gluttony. Moreover, being undeveloped in mind, they

are most easily appealed to through the senses, and especially appreciate what perhaps may be called the *argumentum ad ventrem*. How should a man be a loved companion of children? "Children," says Elia, "are unhealthy companions for grown people." One man in twenty possesses the mysterious charm which enables him to become the small boys' hero, just as here and there is found one who possesses a mysterious influence over the natives of Borneo or Central Africa; but these are "*raræ aves*." Your ordinary usher is, at most, tolerated by his pupils. Who shall say wherein lies this power over men or boys? It is such a subtle combination of qualities as to baffle the attempts of such an unpretending analyst as the writer.

Recognising this difficulty, many a man is worried by the thought that he is unfit for the work he has set himself to do. He feels the wideness of the gulf that lies between him and the life of the urchins with whom he has to mingle daily, and knows that this mingling is, so to speak, a sham—a mechanical mixture, in the words of science, and not a chemical one. With all his efforts to establish a *rapport*, he finds that he is a failure. Fond as he may be of nine out of ten of the boys with whom he has to deal, he fails to make them understand this, and though he may be outwardly respected, he knows that socially, as it were, he is only tolerated.

Another man will make the great mistake of “touting” for popularity,

than which no error is more fatal. Some apology is due to you, indulgent reader, for any allusion to the stale old proverb about familiarity and contempt; but in no instance does it receive so striking an illustration as in the case we are now supposing. Let a man be a good cricketer, a fine athlete, a great scholar, as handsome as Apollo and as accomplished, yet if he make the deadly error of laying himself out to be popular, he will win only contempt. It has often been remarked that boys are keen observers of character, and soon take a man's measure; and so, no doubt, even small boys are. They do not think the matter out, nor, probably, could they put their estimate into words, save the most vague, and perhaps unparliamentary ones; but.

there is no mistake they so easily discover as the one to which we are alluding. The certain result of such a course is that our usher loses whatever influence he may have had before, causes the more forward boys to become impudent, and destroys feelings of respect in the minds of the better natured. What shall be said too of the loss of self-respect which must surely follow? A man must by timely reserve maintain that "divinity" which should "hedge" a master; a certain amount of mystery must shroud him, if he wishes to play the demi-god.

A favourite sentiment often in the mouths of the great race of lookers-on in general, and of headmasters in particular, is this—*that boys must be*

interested in their work. Nay, we have even heard ushers confide this great arcanum to each other with much complacency. Herein lies another of the usher's difficulties. No one denies the desirability of the course recommended (with the reservation—*if possible*). It was the legitimate task of Hercules to slay lion and hydra, and cleanse Augean stables; but by ordinary folks how should such tasks be accomplished? Even the wisdom of "principals" shall perhaps fail to furnish a recipe, if run into a corner. With elder boys who are beginning to acquire some taste for literature it is a rather different matter; though even here the task is—heaven knows—hard enough.

Again, even among small boys

there is one here and there who is by nature studious and easily interested in any kind of learning. A spurious form of "interest" may also be induced by means of stirring emulation and fostering the love of the feeling of superiority, which is strongly implanted in many boys' hearts.

But the ordinary stupid little boy—who is to interest him in *amo*? What wizard shall cast a glamour over the Greek accidence or the multiplication table? It is just this feeling of hopelessness which drives the ordinary usher to the mere exaction of task work. Looking back at our childhood, how many of our own preceptors were possessed of this magic power? It is a charmingly romantic idea, however, and will doubtless be ere

long carried out generally—in Utopia.

A conscientious man, possessed of common sense and an appreciation of the ridiculous besides, has to sustain a continued struggle between a sense of duty on the one hand and on the other a recognition of the weakness of boys' nature, compassion for them under the dreariness of school hours, and a semi-comical feeling that he is playing the ungrateful *rôle* of the tyrant of childhood. Tyrant, no doubt; but, consider, soft-hearted reader, or try to imagine, if you are not a schoolmaster, the infinite power of annoyance possessed by a class of even very small boys.

In view of the practical powerlessness of the ordinary usher in the matter of punishment, we venture to

doubt if the most bloodthirsty pedagogue of them all can inflict on his class a tithe of the torture which they can (and often do) inflict on him. Verily, in a sense somewhat different to that supplied by the original context, we may exclaim with Juvenal—

Perimit sævos classis numerosa tyrannos.

Finally, we must touch upon the greatest drawback to the happiness of the usher's life—his very *bête noire*—that usually, though varying much in size and ferocity, unsettles his peace of mind and blights, by its hateful presence, his otherwise fairly enjoyable existence. Those to whom the details of the usher's life are familiar, will doubtless have already guessed the

object of our allusion: to the uninitiated some explanation will be necessary, even when we state that the bugbear mentioned above is termed variously "supervision" and "playground duty." By this name then, O reader unversed in the daily round of pedagogues, is signified that department of an usher's work which implies at once the duties of policeman, detective, gymnastic instructor, and nursemaid. It means that the usher "on duty" (a phrase by the way which enters like iron into the soul of most ushers) must have sole charge of the boys out of school, must accompany them in their walks, be present at all times in the playground, be continually on the watch lest they should take their coats off when hot, lie on the grass, fight, throw

stones, get their boots muddy, tear their clothes, or in short, commit any of the thousand and one peccadilloes common to healthy childhood. The severity of this infliction varies, of course, with the disposition of the principal. In some instances, where the school is a small one and there is only one assistant, the wretched man is doomed to live with the boys in school and out, from the time they get up in the morning until the prayed-for hour of bedtime; and even after this it may happen that he is responsible for their good order in the dormitories. This, of course, would be an extreme case. In other instances the work may be divided among several men and be comparatively light. In other cases again the work of "supervision" is

practically dispensed with altogether ; but these are rare.

To many a man (who has never tried it) the work may seem not so black as it is painted. The boys appear "nice little fellows." If he is fond of boys it seems rather a pleasure for him to join in their games and be their hero. For some time after beginning the work a fledgling usher may continue his observation through rose-tinted spectacles ; but gradually the truth is borne in upon him that it is likely to become as disagreeable a task as man ever undertook. Chained to a playground summer and winter, the mere physical discomfort of loafing round a gravel path in the cold, when perhaps the ground is too wet for the boys to be playing at any game, or of

being cooped up in a fusty schoolroom for many hours (in addition to the regular school time) in company with fifty noisy urchins — all this soon causes him to become *désillusionné*. *Crambe repetita—toujours perdrix!* He is, to quote Elia once more, “boy-rid, sick of perpetual boy.” His temper, if he has one, receives irreparable damage. A man here and there may be found of such an exceptional temperament as to stand up against the wear and tear of such a life, and maintain a fair amount of cheerfulness, but to the majority it is gall and worm-wood.

Unhealthy and unhappy, as the effects of this system are acknowledged to be on the men carrying it out, yet something of the kind is unavoidable

in schools consisting entirely of small boys. The public school system, though it may be easily shown to be open to the most terrible abuses, yet in the main works fairly well. But here, those to whom the government is entrusted are presumably almost men in self-respect, and are beginning to display some signs of "moral thoughtfulness." It is of course, however, absurd to attempt to apply any system of self-government, except in its most rudimentary form, to a school of urchins of whom the oldest is perhaps little over fourteen. It is to be remembered on the other hand that the very fact of the majority of the boys in question being such mere children is in itself a safeguard. They have not the self-reliance, astuteness,

and knowledge of evil to get into such serious mischief as elder boys may do. Again, it is tolerably certain that excessive zeal in supervision (according to the well-known "contrariness" in the nature of all men which leads them to do a thing *because* it is forbidden) rather produces a lack of self-reliance and an inclination to look upon all authority as a hostile power, which it is rather praiseworthy to outwit.

While recognising therefore the inevitable nature of some system of supervision, and the necessity that ushers should be sacrificed to the greatest good of the greatest number, it would be well that headmasters should modify their system as far as possible, so as to render it at least not

intolerable. Meanwhile we fear that the ushers must, in homely phrase, even "grin and bear it."





CHAPTER IV.

“A DAY OF MY LIFE.”

The usher sat remote from all,
A melancholy man.

—*Hood.*

The trivial round, the common task.

—*Hymn.*

6.30 *a.m.*—Heavens! what an awful dream! I can hardly yet realise that it was but a dream. My heart still palpitates: my hand doubtless would quiver like an aspen, if it wasn't lying quiet under the bed-clothes. Query—What *is* an aspen? It's just one of those things that everyone talks about without really understanding them.

Mem.—Look it out in a dictionary before breakfast. It's the sort of thing that boys will ask questions about, and it's awkward if one hasn't got an answer ready. Their ingenuity in asking questions is really so wonderful and so perverted. They will insist on being inquisitive on points which are really quite unimportant, or at least about subjects on which I was never enlightened, when a boy, which, I take it, is much the same thing. If I set them to learn the first proposition (quite wide enough field for their little wits to take a breather over), they are sure to want to know who Euclid was, and when he lived, and *why* he wrote what he did;—as if anybody did know those things, except compilers of classical dictionaries, and

the writers of general articles in newspapers.

Ah! but that dream! *Infandum renovo dolorem*. 'Twill haunt me (or perhaps the more effective pronunciation in a thrilling passage would be "harnt") for the rest of the day. Methought that, possessed by a sudden frenzy I seized the sacred person, and boxed the inviolable ears of the Hon. Vere Bumbleton. Oh, the sickening dread that enchained my soul as soon as I had perpetrated the ghastly deed! Not Eugene Aram in his lonely field, with the body of his victim before him, surrounded by the "ragged stick," "heavy stone," "hasty knife," and other implements made use of in accomplishing his "horrid deed"—not Eugene Aram could have felt such a

dismal, dull weight upon his heart, as I did in the last moments of that awful vision. I knew that my doom was sealed—that I had committed the unpardonable sin : my brain reeled, and there passed before my bewildered gaze a zootropic dance of distorted faces, filled with impish glee, exulting over my fall. Distorted as they were, I could still recognise in them the well-known lineaments of my pupils past and present, while in the distance loomed an awful figure, vaguely outlined, yet none the less terrible, which I knew—for I had read my Hood—must be that “ blood-avenging sprite ” —the British parent.

Horresco referens! (alas! I find the habit of clenching everything with a stale quotation from the classics

seems to grow upon the usher—probably from his being under the continual necessity of making a little learning go a long way). Well; thank heaven! it was only a dream. I don't think though that I shall be able to meet the Hon. Bumbleton in school this morning without an inward shudder. I shall feel, when he fixes his fishy eyes upon me (the Hon. B. is neither good-looking, clever, nor well behaved), that he knows all, and shall feel much inclined to put in parenthetically during lessons, like the nervous usher in the ballad—

My gentle boy, remember this
Was nothing but a dream.

It is strange how the idea haunts me. I have had a vague dread of some day committing myself in this way ever

since there was that "row" about young Sniggler having his ears boxed, when poor old Hottington was sent away for taking the law (and the offender) into his own hands. As a matter of fact, I certainly never committed such a brutal outrage on any boy (much less on such a "bloated aristocrat" as the Hon. Bumbleton), and I have now been usher at Coddlington House School for more than two years. Noble position! £100 a-year with board and lodging; treated quite as an equal by the Reverend and his family. And then the splendid possibilities of the work — to be the moulder of the plastic clay of youth, the teacher of the young idea (not to shoot paper pellets in school?), the guide, philosopher, and friend of a

continually varying succession of ardent young natures, the bepraised of parents, the trusted of headmasters. But stay! I fear that I am sleepily dropping into a train of somewhat ecstatic reflections more appropriate to my state of mind three or four years ago. Ahem! I certainly am a trifle — what is it?—*désillusionné* (I don't "take" French) of late. My own ardent young spirit used at one time to suggest all sorts of golden possibilities connected with my calling. All that is past. My lofty aspirations are lowered by several feet. My rose-coloured specs are assuming a distinctly greenish hue. My present inclination is rather to do that which seems my duty with as little inconvenience to myself as possible, and to

shun anything like supererogation. Yet am I not by any means unhappy, nor have I any reason to be discontented with my position, considering the mess I made of my university life. I was born of poor but honest parents, my father being a clergyman who had succeeded in bringing up a family on £350 a-year. I was taught Latin and Greek on the charitable foundation of a public school, and was then elected to a sizarship. What a life mine was at the “’varsity.” Verily those years may have been ill-spent, but I should hardly care after all to be without the idea of them to look back upon. Surely they were the golden time of my whole life. And were they after all too dearly bought? Rowing, racquets, tennis, cricket, whist, loo, wine clubs,

a “gulf” in “mods,” a “plough” in “honour Greats,” with a subsequent “pass” by the “skin of my teeth”—and behold me now—Frederick Feeder, B.A., assistant master (otherwise usher) at Coddlington House, preparatory school (for the sons of the nobility and gentry, three miles from the seaside town of Muddleborough in the county of Fussex).

A noble position truly, and leads—to what? Heaven knows. At any-rate I can manage to remain as I am yet awhile. Luckily I am more or less able to play the part of king or hero in the matter of football and cricket, so that I am valuable enough while my thews hold out. Moreover, I remember enough of my school learning to hold my own in the schoolroom,

even in the presence of the Reverend himself, who, to say the truth, is not a very brilliant scholar; while of the rest Jones is the only one who pretends to much familiarity with the classics. My only dread is that I may live to see Latin and Greek—my sole accomplishments—ousted from the “curriculum,” with, in their stead, French, German, mathematics, and the ologies—and then that fellow Jones—bah! I must get up.

7.45 a.m.—*Scene: the Big School-room.*—Most of the boys are here before me. What a curious fact it is that whenever I imagine myself somewhat behindhand and make great haste, omitting to shave and otherwise hurrying over my morning toilet, I am

sure, when I breathlessly enter the room, to find that I have full five minutes to the good, and have arrived on the scene before most of my colleagues. On the other hand, when I virtuously rise before it seems absolutely necessary, and keep complacently murmuring that I have five minutes to spare, I either eventually find myself hopelessly behind time, or, at best, just slip in, with a kind of guilty feeling, at the last moment. On this occasion it seems that I have disquieted myself in vain. Only the indefatigable Bugsby has anticipated me, and he lives on the spot, performing the delightful duties of house master. I don't like that fellow Bugsby; he is such an irreproachable machine; never late and

always right. There he stands, glaring through his pedagogical spectacles, the very picture of ill-humoured punctiliousness. He has just utterly crushed Squibbs *minimus*, who had dared to break the awful stillness that precedes our morning devotions, by an audible whisper to the effect that "Old Feeder has got a new coat on this morning":—and so I have—a quite sufficiently remarkable circumstance to invite observation. But friend Bugsby is a martinet or disciplinarian, of some twenty or thirty years' standing, and ill brooks such flippant breaches of decorum. I employ the interval in wondering whether I too shall fossilize into a Bugsby twenty years hence. That conviction alone were enough to disgust me with my profession. Well,

I suppose I must exchange the usual morning salutation with him (an infinitesimal nod passes between us and a muttered reference to the inclemency of the weather). I don't much think Bugsby cares for me either. I fancy he suspects me of what Mr. Gradgrind's friend termed "peacockery." The fact is that perhaps I presume a little in my intercourse with him on my Cambridge degree. Poor Bugsby's academical career and his honours—if any—won therein are shrouded in the mist of ages.

Enter Foker, with a studied grace and an air of considerable importance, followed by Jones, with his usual "shining morning face."

Masherley, our remaining colleague, is, of course, late, and won't appear

till breakfast time. I fear that Masherley has a keener sense of his bodily than of his spiritual needs, and that it will take some time to transform him into the model or machine-like usher, if, indeed, he ever reaches that higher stage of development.

7.50.—In bustles the Reverend. He greets us with a benevolent smile, and alludes graciously to the number of degrees of frost registered by his thermometer. The Reverend, owing, I suppose, to many years' familiarity with the rostrum, seems to be always trying to lend to all subjects of conversation an impressiveness that is sometimes foreign to them. It is the same cause perhaps that has produced in him a habit of alluding to the

greater lights of the intellectual galaxy as "old," or "poor old," or even "dear old" Kennedy, Max Müller, Smith, Liddell, &c. More ill-natured critics declare that these expressions are made use of by him of deliberate purpose to imply his familiarity with, and perhaps superiority to the works of these persons.

This morning a practical point is certainly lent to his remarks by the palpable insufficiency of the hot-water pipes which are supposed to warm this large and airy apartment. Surely the builder might have spared to enclose them behind those huge cast-iron gratings—one would be seldom in danger of burning one's fingers on them even if they were left unprotected. Is it an inherent defect, or

accidental mismanagement, which makes apparatus of this kind everywhere become hot in *direct* instead of *inverse* proportion to the warmth of the atmosphere? Given a warm, steaming day in spring, and these pipes will be hot enough to make the room unbearable to anyone but an inhabitant of Guiana. But on a cold winter's morning like this, Iser itself could not roll more wintry-cold than the water that circulates through them.

The Reverend reaches his desk, and with a prelude of some hundred and fifty boots scraping on the floor, prayers begin.

Surely, by the way, bearing in mind that these prayers are intended almost exclusively for the mouths and minds of mere children, some form might be

found less ridiculously inappropriate. The phraseology is far above the intellects of little boys, and in places demands, even in the adult mind, a special theological training to supply the right interpretation. I wonder if it has ever struck the Reverend that the Articles require services to be read "in a tongue understood of the people?"

Prayers are no sooner over than the door slowly opens and in sneaks Podgers. Podgers is one of our incurables, he is always late. It seems a constitutional infirmity with him, and he bids fair to become such a sluggard as is handed down by the hymn to the derision and abhorrence of posterity. The hymn, by the way, it has often struck me, does not make out so strong

a case against the sluggard as might be made. For it seems a fair enough request of his that if he *had* been awakened *too soon*, he should be allowed peacefully "to slumber again."

The bell rings while the Reverend is mildly rebuking Podgers, and, headed by the stern Bugsby, as a sort of fugleman, we file in long procession into the breakfast-room.

8 *a.m.*.—Breakfast has been much lauded by writers of light literature as the most comfortable and sociable meal of the whole triplet. Looking at it from an usher's point of view, I cannot say that I can altogether endorse their sentiments. Comfortable it is—in the holidays. But even then,

my experience of the habits of large families leads me to be sceptical of its sociability ; not unfrequently, except in model households, each particular breakfaster has the room to himself. But at school -- here am I at the head of a long narrow table, set at intervals with plates of thick slices of bread (for at "our school" we are emancipated from the traditional "bread-and-scrape," and each boy has his bit of butter served out to him). On each side of the table sit a thickly packed row of urchins. Foker, my colleague, faces me at the opposite end of the table ; but at the distance of five-and-twenty feet not much conversation is possible. Moreover, even if he were at a more reasonable distance, to say truth, Foker's talk, though occasionally

amusing, would be apt to pall. He is a man who, though quite innocent of most of the qualities that go to make a successful schoolmaster, is yet quite blinded to his own defects by a curiously mild conceit. He has a smattering of most kinds of learning, but his specialty is reading, writing, and arithmetic. Though grandiloquent in speech, he is evidently at considerable pains to do justice to the letter H, which occasionally, in moments of excitement, becomes a sad stumbling-block to him. He is distinguished again by a grandeur and pomposity of manner which leads one to suspect that he must at some time or another have been a diligent and credulous student of books of etiquette.

Similarly dotted about the heads

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of the other tables are Masherley (who has just slipped in), Jones, and that fellow Bugsby.

It is odd how the boys I care least about always seem fated to come and sit by me at meals. I am flanked by Squirt *minor* and Feebles, to both of whom I have a particular objection. Now, Jones has got a perfect crowd of the best boys in the school round him. It is extraordinary how popular that man is. He isn't a great scholar or athlete, nor brilliant in any way. He never lays himself out to be popular, nor assumes any extra suavity of manner, as the custom of some is. Masherley is a good all round man, clever in the school and skilful in the playground, yet his popularity is small compared with Jones's. Foker is a

nonentity; and Bugsby takes such particular pains to make himself disagreeable all the way round that he hardly counts; while as for my poor self, whatever may be my virtues or failings, I certainly haven't that knack of attracting boys which Jones certainly possesses.

Breakfast, the most comfortable meal! I would I could seize on the inventor of that humbug, and by some dread spell compel him to assume my place and identity for but twenty minutes; I warrant he would soon enough be ready to beg for release at the price of recantation. I have now been sitting here little more than a quarter-of-an-hour, and already I have had to make myself disagreeable a dozen times. This is being "autocrat

of the breakfast table " with a vengeance. First of all, of course, Bubbles and Squeekington must be rebuked for conversing together, shrilly and boisterously, across the table. Next, Gutler and Swilford are detected in conspiring together, with intent to defraud Titmouse of his lawful share of butter. Then Wolf *major* has to be reproved for tearing fragments off a huge crust with his teeth, instead of cutting it duly with his knife. Comberbatch will sit with both elbows on the table, and Bogus *major* is caught in the act of pouring hot tea with a spoon down the back of his neighbour's neck, and so on, and so on. A comfortable meal this indeed, with one eye on one's plate and one rolling like a revolving light, so as to survey twenty

troublesome urchins in the shortest possible time.

How some men manage to make themselves amusing and agreeable to their small neighbours in addition to feeding themselves and keeping order, is to me a mystery. I have tried to lure Squirt *minor* and Feebles into conversation already this morning, but have succeeded in eliciting no more than "yes-sir!" on the one part, and "no-sir!" on the other, so I have given up in despair. Moreover, the room is so chilly (owing to the refrigerative presence of more hot-water pipes), and the whole position is so uncomfortable, that it is difficult to feel at all at ease or to make one's self agreeable. Now Jones, on the other hand, is evidently just in the middle

of a good story, which he is illustrating by diagrams, composed of knives, forks, and plates, arranged before him on the table. The heads and shoulders, halfway up his table on either side, are bending all in one direction, like corn before the wind; each face is decked with a broad grin, and every ear is strained to catch the words of wit or wisdom that fall from the mouth of Jones. He has just begun another story, apparently more funny than the last. Even at this distance I can catch some fragments, from which, by a synthetical process, I arrive at a fair idea of the gist of the tale. Thus, I can distinguish, "Chimney-sweep—black as your hat—waded in—catch the eel by the tail—saw his legs were white—called to his wife—Kathleen! docthor

—paralysed entirely!” An appreciative laugh closes the merry jest, and cries of, “Please, sir! tell us another, sir!”

Meanwhile Bugsby, who has been glaring through his glasses down the table (at which he confronts Jones), exhibiting a sort of stony distaste for such unseemly conduct at meal times, sees *his* opportunity for a score off somebody, and forthwith sends out of the room (with an accompaniment of thunder and lightning) little Pincher, who has taken advantage of the excitement caused by the story to kick his bitter foe Podgers under the table.

A quiet pause follows, during which we all sit still and watch Foker, who, alone of the company, has not finished

his breakfast. It's an odd thing how often that fellow Foker keeps us waiting in this way. Whether it be that he is careful of his digestion, or fancies that it adds a certain dignity, and is, as it were, a display of independent spirit, I know not. But he is always at it.

Well, it's all over at last, and at the signal from Bugsby (who is "senior" master) we rise for grace, and disperse till schooltime.

My particular duties of playground-master compel me to loaf about the sheds and the dry playground while the boys "take the air" before school. A bitter wind sweeps round all the corners, and gives me some idea of the delights of "sentry-go." This half-hour always seems to be, so to speak,

one of the longest hours in the day. I envy the boys who are playing prisoners' base, and should like to join in the game. Unfortunately, however, the Reverend has very fixed ideas about the propriety of his masters joining in games. His theory is that we should encourage and foster the various sports in the playground, but should not join in them. Perhaps some explanation of this idea of his may be found in the fact that history records not any occasion on which the Reverend, even in his younger days, took part in any childish sports himself. He likes to describe himself as having been quite a "reading man," though in his less serious moments he will sometimes speak vaguely of having "walked his forty miles in a day."

The idea has occurred to some that *his* forty miles are perhaps shorter than other people's.

9 a.m.—*Schooltime*.—Though in a spirit contrary to all tradition, I must confess to a feeling of pleasure when at last the bell rings, and I have an excuse for getting indoors again. The hot-water pipes have just got the chill off, and really, after the “nipping and eager air” outside, the atmosphere of the schoolroom seems quite comfortable. Let us shut all doors and windows and create as far as possible what is known in the elegant language of schoolboys as a “good frowst.” It may be at the expense of oxygen, but human nature is weak, and compared with the north-easter that whistles

outside, welcome carbonic acid and asphyxia.

My colleagues are all in the room already, and are engaged each in characteristic fashion.

Jones is talking pleasantly to two or three of the smaller boys who have just come in.

Masherley, with his hands in the pockets of his irreproachable Oxford-made trousers, toothpick in mouth, is seated at his desk in a posture of easy grace. Presently he takes a piece of paper and begins sketching—probably a caricature of the Reverend. Bugsby is leaning with his back to the window, and has button-holed the compliant Foker. He has evidently got a grievance (Bugsby always has a grievance), and is retailing it to sympathetic

ears. I guess from his earnestness that he is dwelling upon the savage and intractable nature of the boys, the general lack of discipline (Bugsby's strong point is discipline), and the supineness of the Reverend's attitude towards Bogus *major*, who is Bugsby's *bête noire*—Bogus by the way not far off is employing his time in inking the clean collar of an unsuspecting neighbour.

The boys now come trooping in by twos and threes, and flop down at their desks in a more or less discontented way, very hot many of them after their prisoners' base, and fanning themselves with their caps. Knots of them in different parts of the room are talking together, some excitedly, as arguing still some disputed point

in their game. In one place Codlin, the general buffoon of the school, is giving a special performance to a delighted ring of spectators. In every school there seems to be at least one Codlin. He generally has the reputation of being "mad" among his companions, and whatever he does or says is sure to be greeted with a laugh. I think an unhealthy self-consciousness is at the bottom of such harmless lunacy. I notice that in his wildest moments of frenzy Master Codlin is always glancing out of the corner of his eye, to see if any master is near and likely to be watching him.

As the hands of the clock reach the hour of nine the Reverend enters, and solemnly proceeds to his special class-room, where he "superintends

the studies " of the elder boys. After a few moments of commands of silence, shuffling of feet, and whispering, work begins.

In the schoolroom Masherley, Bugsby, Foker, and I have all to take our classes together.

Masherley is taking the Fourth in Cæsar selections, Bugsby the Third in English history. Foker is supposed to be instructing the Second in copy-writing and dictation, while the First Class falls to my lot this hour, the subject on my programme being Latin exercises. Jones is away in a science classroom, where he devotes his energies to French and the 'ologies. The "class" with which I am engaged is the lowest in the school, and contains three boys. Thus, considering the

small number of my pupils, it might seem that my work was light. But alas! it is the quality and not the quantity in this instance that proves burdensome. Small classes and "individual attention" sound well in prospectuses, and no doubt have advantages for the boys. But how much more so for the masters! Verily, if we had to deal with large classes composed of such stuff as this, I fear that ushers would show badly in the statistics of suicide.

The three boys who compose Class I. are named respectively *Bogus major*, *Potter*, and *Flops*.

Bogus major is a little fidgety urchin of about ten years of age, with a freckled face, hair chronically ruffled, and a curiously-shaped nose. His

whole face has a strange twist in it, as if some one had started to make quite a different face of it, but had suddenly left off without taking the trouble to finish it. He is never still. His legs, by which he might make his fortune in a circus, are always tying themselves in knots. His fingers must be for ever twisting or smearing something. He is never happy unless he has contorted his body into a seemingly impossible attitude. He will bend himself double backwards or twist his head round several degrees farther than the most accomplished tumbler, and will remain in that abnormal position till called to order. He is ten years old, but has only just been emancipated from home and petticoat government and started on the painful

ascent of the Parnassian steeps. He has not yet learned to learn anything, and consequently always presents himself in total ignorance of his lesson. He still cherishes a belief that he can impose on his long-suffering preceptor (who has watched him perhaps for half-an-hour previously) by contorting his face, when questioned, into an expression of painful anxiety, and desperately ejaculating again what has already been said, or improvising gibberish for the occasion.

Potter is a little pink-faced boy, fragile as a fly, whose mind, whatever there may be of it, has never yet had a fair chance of developing, owing to the delicacy and feebleness of his physique. He has vacant, lack-lustre eyes, and a general appearance of being

too frail to bear the strain of life without cracking. He learns his lesson fairly well, but always has to be recalled from wool-gathering, somewhere a long way off, before he can bring his mind to bear on any question.

Poor Flops is in disposition as nice a little boy as one may hope to meet, with a pleasant, though heavy face, and a twinkle in his eye that betokens a quiet sense of humour. But alas! his brain-power is incredibly small, and, moreover, his education has been sadly neglected. He is eleven years old, and can scarcely read or pronounce his own language. Nevertheless he must learn "his noun and his verb," and the intricacies of *dominus* and *amo* have overwhelmed him. What a

dismal purgatory his hours of lessons must be to him. One were, indeed, hard-hearted, if one did not try to be considerate to poor Flops, to help him gently through the slough of the conjugations, and to lead him with kindly care through the dismal places where the giants—Subject, Object, and Predicate—sit amid the bones of their victims.

My pleasant task this morning is to expound (for the fiftieth time) the abstruse relations existing between the verb and its nominative case, and I take four sentences, as illustrating the four conjugations, viz.:—(1) The soldier fights; (2) The brother fears; (3) The king sends; (4) The general hears. I expound at great length, I write explanations and examples in Latin

and English on a blackboard, and by animation, comic illustration, and persuasive sweetness, endeavour to reach the minds of these young persons. I then set them to write them down.

Now all this has to be done at the top of my voice, for here are Masherley and Bugsby, within a few feet of me, shouting at *their* boys, and at the same time the boys of the Second Class are shouting at Foker. The delightful symphony thus produced proceeds somewhat after this fashion:—*Myself* (tenor)—“The verb agrees with its nominative case in number and person. If then ‘soldier’ is singular number and third person, what number and person will the verb ‘fights’ be?”

Masherley (basso profondo)—“Don’t be so dreadfully inattentive, Podgers.

Here have I been explaining the construction after verbs of 'commanding' for five minutes, and I believe you have been asleep all the while. Repeat what I said!"

Bugsby—(voice indescribable)—
"In 1649, after having gone through the form of trial before a Court appointed for the purpose, Charles I. was beheaded by sentence of his judges. Squirt *minor*! who was beheaded in 1649?"

Foker (very loud and clear and with dignity)—"I should imagine that any boy of ordinary abilities could perform for himself, by accurate imitation of his copy, the task which you expect me to perform for you. It is indeed positive torture to have to instruct such rude and ill-disciplined

boys. Wolfe *major*, take 20 lines for outrageous rudeness towards your preceptor."

All together (whole strength of the company)—"*Miles*, the soldier—*pugnat*, fights"—"Charles I. who was beheaded in 1649 by order of"—"*Cæsar*, Cæsar—*respondit*, answered—*se*, that he—*esse*, was"—"the most impudent and idle boy in the school, sir! Go to the head-master's class-room at once and report yourself for idleness and disturbance!"

Thus the enraged Bugsby. A dead silence follows, during which all eyes are turned on the victim—none other than little Pincher, who is always in mischief. Pincher stumps up the school with a rueful countenance and enters delicately the Reverend's class-room. Hence, after a few moments of

suspense, issue the dull thwacking sound so well known to ushers and schoolboys. Presently Pincher re-enters, again the "cynosure" of his comrades' eyes. But he is a stout little knave, and shows no signs of woe, except that he persists in puckering up his face into a ghastly semblance of a smile, making signs to his companions at the same time that "it didn't hurt a bit," and casting a sulky look at Bugsby.

As soon as this little diversion is over, and masters and boys are able once more to attend to their own business, I summon my three hopeful pupils to bring me the result of their half-hour's labour. On examination, I find that their several renderings of "The soldier fights," are as follows:—

Bogus *major* boldly writes the two words side by side, with a lofty disregard of any inflection whatever—thus, *miles pugno*. Potter gets a little farther on the right road, and renders it *miles pugnes*, his sensitive ear being no doubt caught by the rhyme of the similar terminations.

Flops is stonily contemplating his smeared and blotted paper, on which he has written, with cramped and painful penmanship, *miles pug-*. He knows that the ending of *pugno* ought to be changed somehow, but, not feeling sure how it is to be done, he has been too much overpowered by a sense of his own feebleness to write anything down at all—and this is the fruit of a good half-hour's hard work (on my part). How much valuable

energy and vital force have I expended to no purpose. Truly this is sowing on stony ground with a vengeance. Somehow I don't feel so amiably disposed towards Bogus & Co. as I did at the beginning of the hour. I have a decided inclination to knock their heads together for a trio of stupid young boobies, but unfortunately the system of Coddlington House does not allow of such a proceeding. The unimpassioned looker-on would doubtless tell me that it was entirely my own fault, that I hadn't explained with sufficient lucidity, that I expected too much, that I didn't interest the boys in their work, &c., &c. Very true, no doubt. At the same time I am not unfrequently reminded here of that fashionable school mentioned by

Charles Kingsley in his "Water Babies," "where the masters learned the lessons, and the boys heard them."

The hour is at an end now and, thank goodness! I get rid of Class I. for the present at least. A sort of movement now ensues among the classes, such as that which follows the command of "General Post!" in the children's game, and I find myself now in charge of Class IV., whom I have to "take" in Greek grammar. This "taking" means that I watch them learning it for the first half-hour, and hear them say it the second. I set the lesson, and sit down to watch the process of preparation. This class consists of fourteen boys, among whom all degrees of stupidity find representation. Podgers and Comberbach are prominent

members from this point of view, and represent the more abysmal kind of vacuity. Not far behind them comes my friend of this morning's vision—the Hon. Vere Bumbleton. Ramshackle and Scatterbrain are also fairly depressing examples of inner darkness.

It is curious to watch their various methods of application. Some bury their heads in their hands and, grasping their hair firmly on either side, seem to devote heart and soul to the task, forcing their brains down to it as it were by very manual pressure. Others sit in a more easy posture and read the words over and over from the book in a loudish whisper. Others stare vacantly at the walls or ceiling, and when asked if they are minding their work, reply that they were “say-

ing it over to themselves." All, if I look suddenly and inquiringly at them, begin to move their lips violently, as though in a fervour of industry.

At last I call them up and find that perhaps three or four of them know their lesson respectably, the rest presenting various shades of ignorance, ranging from a casual acquaintance with the commoner forms down to a complete absence of ideas on this or any other subject. It is a little discouraging certainly, and makes one enter into the feelings of the sad Cowper when he wrote—

I am tired
Of dropping buckets into empty wells
And drawing nothing up.

However, one gets used to it and can at least welcome the end of the hour, which now approaches.

And now we may go out again for half-an-hour's relaxation, not to say refrigeration. More of the latter than the former falls to my lot; for it is still my enviable task to patrol the playground and keep an eye on my lively young friends. There they go! Two of them are having a regular set to with fists in a corner, which must be stopped presently. Yonder again a crowd of howling and leaping young savages is collected round Feebles, whom I can hear them accusing loudly of the base crime of "sneaking." Two more are rolling on the wet grass, where they have no business to be at all. I rescue Feebles from the clutches of the infuriated mob; call off the rollers on the grass with a voice of thunder; and then proceed more lei-

surely to stop the fight, which is really rather a scientific affair, and has attracted a ring of spectators. I suppose it is the leaven of "brutal" Saxony in my nature that makes me always rather loath to interfere with a real stand-up fight. I always affect partial deafness and blindness for a while on such occasions; but the Reverend is so much averse to this relic of barbarism being found in his model establishment, that I feel bound to put a stop to fights — after a reasonable time. Even now the cries of "Go it, Wolfe!" — "Give it him, Gutler!" — become so audible that I have to hear it at last, and bustle up to separate the fiery combatants, who after all haven't hurt each other much. The young rascals are not in the least taken in by my

feigned displeasure, and are rather inclined to favour me with details of the late encounter. This disposition, however, I feel it my duty sternly to repress, and stalk away with dignified severity after having delivered a short homily on the time-honoured text of "Let dogs delight," &c.

Another ten minutes' aimless loafing brings us to the hour of "Second School," and the bell rings.

Second School, 12.0.—Luckily, this hour my work is rather more interesting. I am engaged with the Sixth Class on Latin verses. I had always rather a taste for this branch of scholarship; and though I never arrived at any high degree of excellence, yet was so thoroughly well drilled at my old

school in the mysteries of prosody that I am seldom caught napping at a "quantity," or at a loss for convenient tags and iambic dissyllables for the coping-stones of "pentameters."

Latterly, however, I have begun to lose my interest in these sports of the Muses.

There is a Philistine spirit abroad which threatens the existence of "verses" as a part of the modern curriculum; and I suppose I am infected with it. At the same time, though quite realizing the uselessness of Latin verses to most boys, it is a sad parting which I see foreshadowed. It is like leaving an old friend. The ear in which an artificial taste for the curiously mechanical prosody of the Latins has once been induced, has a

strange longing after the "long roll of the hexameter." It is like a taste for oysters or tobacco, or anything else that is nasty at first; the longing seems to vary in direct proportion with the original nastiness. And I find myself inventing excuses to justify the dear old familiar survival of the time when Greek and Latin were thought the only learning worth the acquiring. I tell myself (and others, when they advance any hostile argument) that the making of Latin verses is an education to the taste; an exercise for the common sense; a training for the ear; in fact, a perfect gymnasium for the intellectual faculties all round. But it's of no use; I don't believe it myself; and, worst of all, the boys don't believe it either. The young rascals have no doubt

heard sneers from practical papas and sarcastic uncles on the subject; whispers go about that a great deal of time is wasted on Latin verses, and that a boy had much better be learning something that will be practically useful to him. However, I try to shut my eyes and ears and make believe that I am as undoubting an enthusiast as I was barely ten years ago at my old Grammar School. I have by the way a horrid suspicion that not only verses, but Latin and Greek generally, are doomed to "slowly and silently vanish away" before the steady advance of mathematics and modern languages. Why, only a short time ago, I heard a youngster of fourteen, with the most consummate audacity dare to give vent to an elaborate sneer against the

venerable Arnold. He was pleased, this dainty youth, to hold up to derision that sentence (sacred as a Delphic inscription to all rightly-constituted persons of the old school), "It stood through you *by which the less* (*quominus*) he should do it!" Shuddering, I heard, and looked for the bolts of Jove to consume the impious boy. No doubt he did it in the innocence of his heart, and knowing not what he said; but are not these verily signs of the times?

I always set to work then at verses, with a secret misgiving that I am assisting, as it were, at an old world ceremony, and am far behind the times I live in. Nevertheless it has to be done.

The Sixth Class consists of six

boys. Five of these are fairly quick at doing adapted English into elegiacs. They are all using a book compiled by one of the assistant masters at Muddleborough: it is called "Climakes; or, Back Stairs to Parnassus." The sixth lad, whose name is Grills, is very far behind them, and has only just begun to learn the rules of prosody. Grills is a specimen of that unsatisfactory creature, the "boy from another school." It is, indeed, a strange fact that the boy from another school is almost invariably unsatisfactory. In fact, one may safely say that he is always so when, as in the case of our friend Grills, he comes at the advanced age of thirteen or fourteen. Head-masters, in my experience, are so well aware of this fact, that they almost

always start with a strong prejudice against the unfortunate newcomer. "Well, you know" (with a raising of the eyebrows), "the boy comes from Rumpus's, and I rather fancy—though I don't want to say anything ill-natured—that Rumpus is not much of a disciplinarian;" or, "What do you make of that boy Newcome, Mr. Feeder? Well, I don't know how it is, but the lad knows positively nothing. He's been for three years at one of those large London day schools, you know, and, ah, well, between you and me, they *don't* do much at those places," &c., &c., &c.

Far be it from us to hint that any of this arises from professional jealousy. To put it more charitably, it is the *mauvais sujets* that most often change

their places of education; *cælum non animum mutant*. Of course, if one of our youngsters were to shift his quarters, the case no doubt would be different, and he would be welcomed for the cherub he is by any other headmaster. While, as for Newcome, Grills, & Co. —well, it's quite wonderful the change for the better produced in those boys after a few terms of Coddlington House. "Ah, you should have seen them when they came to us, you know."

Grills then is a boy from another school, and of course not so forward as he ought to be. For a whole hour Grills, who is a bit of a buffoon by the way, with a tendency to be always on the broad grin, when I look up, is puzzling over two lines. Now, to

anyone inexperienced in the perverse ingenuity of the boy from another school, it might almost appear impossible to put the words wrong, so obvious is the right order and so eager seem the words to trip it in the elegiac measure. But, unfortunately, Grill's first step in the manufacture of his verses is to write down the words with a hopeless disregard of syntax. This then first has to be put straight for him. Next, with great care and neatness, he proceeds to "mark the quantities." The effects of this wholesome precaution, however, are rather marred by the fact that Grills has a tendency, in the first place, to make the quantities as he thinks they might be or ought to be; and, secondly, after referring to his gradus, to forget what

he found there and, to save trouble, substitute his own marking. Verily, Grills is one that requires "individual attention;" and, after all's said and done, he produces, neatly copied out, one elegiac couplet. Perhaps the English which has engaged his attention all this time is worth transcription owing to its very originality. It runs as follows—

Elegant servant does not fill embossed cups,
But boy with ingenuous countenance holds out
beechn [cups].

Meanwhile the rest of the class have been devoting their energies to still further mangling the *dissecta membra poetæ* to be discovered in the following spirited adaptation—

Ardent love of enterprise
Inspires British sailor,
Hence Cook (Cocceius) navigates distant seas
And, led by Heaven, ploughs waters.

What a magnificent text might be furnished by these two quotations from "Climakes" for a sermon against Latin verses.

This then, more or less rendered into Latin, represents our hour's work. It is a pity that in this age of inventions some clever physiologist does not invent a machine to gauge, for instance, the extent to which by this hour's training the taste has been educated, the memory strengthened, and the mental powers generally developed. I have a suspicion that, in this instance, the result would be discouraging enough to make out a strong case against verses. Ha! the dinner bell. At my signal the lesson ends, and the class disperses.

1.15 *p.m.*—*Dinner.*—After ten minutes or so of hand-washing and waiting about, the second bell rings, and Bugsby, once more placing himself at the head of the procession, leads the way in a solemn and stately manner into the dining-hall. Woe to the ill-advised youngster who should unwittingly touch the tip of Bugsby's coat-tail, or tread upon his sacred heel. Everyone knows well that immediate annihilation were a mild phrase to indicate the result of such a proceeding. We all assume our places, which by the way are not the same which we occupied at breakfast. This is owing to the fact that the Reverend and his wife preside at the high table.

Our dinner is not sumptuous, but

plain and satisfying. It consists of—first course, roast mutton (with the alternative of hashed beef) accompanied by potatoes, boiled in their skins, and cabbages a trifle woody; second course, rice pudding.

The Reverend says grace and smacks his lips, and we all fall to. My daily problem is this—how to help twelve little boys, and at the same time to get enough myself to ensure me against ravenous hunger later on. Honestly, it becomes a mere question of “stoking;” and such a science has this become with me that I have generally completed my dinner before the first boy has come again for a second helping. My position is better in some respects than at breakfast, for I am faced by the veteran Bugsby, whose

presence carries a feeling of dread into the hearts of the most unruly occupants of the table. He rolls his terrible eye along the row of munching urchins, and woe to him who puts his elbows on the table, or reaches across or nudges his neighbour, or looks anything but good. At the same time I myself must confess to a shrinking from the fiery glances shot through the Bugsbeian spectacles. I feel a tendency to fidget in my chair and smile at nothing. Meanwhile, involuntarily, I drop my usual out-of-school manner towards the boys, which seems in this presence to savour too much of frivolity, and find myself, by unconscious imitation, I suppose, glaring and snapping and bullying as fiercely as my colleague opposite.

Dinner is soon over, for we pride ourselves on our celerity in this matter. After just half-an-hour's clatter, crash, rattle, and buzz, the Reverend's chair is pushed back with a "scroop," which is the signal for rising; and after grace we file out again as we entered, drill-sergeant Bugsby at the head.

1.45 *p.m.*—*Playground.*—And now begins for wretched me the most painful portion of the solid day. Verily, this is the true *hora gaudiorum* spoken of so touchingly in the old song. For two mortal hours am I bound prisoner to this patch of green, these gravelled walks. The north-easter of the morning hath by no means abated, but still sings cruelly through the bare branches of the trees which border one

side of the playground. At either end of the green the two gaunt poles of the football goals stand bare and grim as a gallows-tree.

Certainly, there are moments in an usher's life when the sense of its interminable cheerlessness comes overwhelmingly upon him. Heavens! think of ten, twenty, thirty more years of this! It is maddening to think now of the warm fireside and the comfortable pipe (the usher's friend), and the interesting paper or novel, and the snug arm-chair. There goes Masherley, vaulting all the gates, down to his comfortable cottage. I can almost find it in my heart to hate the dashing Masherley. What business has he to shew off his good spirits before me? Foker has shuffled off to

his "diggings" also, and Bugsby has mounted to his chamber up among the dormitories. How Bugsby manages to amuse himself, by the way, it is difficult to conjecture. Apparently he keeps no books, and reads nothing but the *Daily Telegraph*. As few people, however, have the hardihood to enter his apartment, this mystery must remain for the present unsolved. Jones stays a moment behind the rest. He is finishing off with great animation some explanation started at dinner-time; an admiring crowd surrounds him. This done, he turns to me and condoles with me on the coldness of the day. It's rather an annoying habit on the part of Jones, this unsought commiseration. Of course it only prompts me to pretend that it isn't particularly cold,

and remark that I'm quite used to it, &c. Jones is the kindest-hearted man in the world, but he has rather a knack of saying the wrong thing. After a few more remarks Jones can't stand the wind any longer and trots off with his hands in his pockets, leaving the world to general cussedness and me.

And now my toil begins. First of all the loafers have to be hunted out of the holes and corners where they conceal themselves. The most notorious offender in this respect is perhaps young Ragworthy, more commonly known by the name of Rags. He is physically a feeble boy, but gifted with wonderful vivacity in the wrong direction. He is the biggest chatterbox in the school, and is so self-conscious and

fond of notice that he will get into small scrapes purposely, that he may attract attention. He is a genuine loafer. I tremble to think of the number of tarts, cakes, ices, and bottles of ginger beer which this young gentleman will without doubt daily put away, when he goes to Muddleborough and enjoys the practically unlimited freedom of a public school. Satan finds some mischief still; and surely there is a class of boys in whose case public schools fail utterly. Yet no one doubts that the theory is a fine one, and very successful in moulding stronger natures. Puzzle—To find a system of education (or anything else) against which a fair percentage of failures cannot be urged.

I find friend Rags where I expected,

snugly esconced behind a door on the top of some hot-water pipes. He has with him one of Mayne Reid's most scathing romances, and by the suspicious stickiness of his hands and face I am led to suspect that he has eluded the vigilance of the Reverend, and smuggled the accursed thing—"sweets"—into these sacred precincts. I drag him forth along with several other urchins who do not like fresh air, and drive them before me like sheep into the playground.

A dismal game of football has been started, but as it is not a half-holiday, and the boys are dressed in their ordinary clothes, the game is not "compulsory." Only the keener spirits therefore join in it, while the rest loaf about the dry playground or round the

walks. Some of the players have so arranged matters that all the big boys are on one side and all the little ones on the other. This slight mistake has to be rectified, much to the chagrin of Blobbs *major* (who is the biggest boy in the school).

And now begins my official perambulation round the path which encircles the grass. Here I encounter Sidney Vavasour, the captain of our eleven. He is a regular budding Eton swell, and is always beautifully dressed, wearing considerable jewellery in the way of diamond pins, &c. He returns a characteristic answer to my expostulations against his laziness in not joining the game — it makes his collar so dirty. It certainly seems a curious thing that arrangements can-

not be made for boys always to change their clothes for play-time. Surely health and comfort, and especially cleanliness, demand it. There is a strange, old-fogyish notion abroad to the effect that boys are more liable to catch cold if they put on their flannels.

Round and round, backwards and forwards I trudge, now settling disputes, now stopping fights, now urging on with winged words the smaller fry, who will sit on the damp grass and make mud pies. Every half-hour or so the Reverend toddles down to see that all goes well, and that the boys keep their coats on in this cold wind. Sometimes too the form of his spouse is seen dimly, gliding among the trees that separate their garden from the playground.

Now and then she even comes down to speak to me—she is *so* anxious, Mr. Feeder, that the boys should be careful this cold day. Only just now she saw de Vere, a most delicate boy, standing without his coat; and the Earl and the Countess had both so *particularly* asked her, &c., &c.

Truly the Reverend seems to have hit on a solution of the time-honoured question—*Custodes quis custodiet?*

Round and round, backwards and forwards, *solvitur ambulando*. And now at last the penance is over and the bell rings for afternoon school.

4.0 p.m. *Afternoon School*.—I always enter afternoon school—we begin at four o'clock in the winter—with a misgiving that I shall find it very

disagreeable, and by consequence prove horribly disagreeable myself to all with whom I have to do. It is exactly the hour at which I feel least inclined to enter the somewhat dreary precincts of the schoolroom. There is always something heavy and depressing in the atmosphere of afternoon school; and the boys are the first to feel this without knowing it, as the saying goes. Then do the meekest and quietest boys sometimes astonish one by displays of unruliness and a tendency towards fooling, while the more habitually troublesome seem possessed of Legion. I should not like to have been usher — if such institutions existed there—in the “land where it seemed always to be afternoon.” I am wearied already by two hours’ aimless loafing

about a dank and gusty playground. I feel that my temper is like a match that has been "rubbed lightly" several times; it wants but another touch to be in a blaze.

I employ myself for a few moments in bottling up the vials of my wrath with the corks of philosophy; but I know too well, alas! that these are not unfrequently but inefficient stoppers. To add to my discomfort, the whole of afternoon school is devoted to Euclid with the Third and Fourth Classes: the latter are big, turbulent, and stupid; the former is a subject which I detest with a lively hatred.

However it must be done; the clock strikes four; in marches the Reverend; my colleagues disperse to their several departments; I take off

my coat, as it were, and doggedly set my shoulder to the wheel.

Surely the rolling stone of Sisyphus brought him not such toil as this ; nor were the hopes of that mythological victim more surely disappointed, each time the confounded thing rolled back, than are mine, as again and again I vainly imagine that I have been firmly fixing a great geometrical truth in one of these slippery brain-pans. Each time does some misplaced "and" or "therefore," or some soul-sickening confusion of angle and triangle shew me too plainly that the ingenious youth before me has with diabolical ingenuity missed the point at issue, or perhaps learnt the "reading" by heart without looking at the "pictures." I expound, exhort, demonstrate, draw

diagrams, reason, entreat, shout, urge, abuse, drive, drag, pull, gesticulate, pour forth floods of burning eloquence, and expend pounds of chalk (the greater part of which finds its way on to my clothes and hands), but to very little purpose. Vacant, wandering or half-shut eyes, fidgeting fingers, yawning mouths, half concealed by reluctant hands, all show me too plainly the Sisyphean nature of my task. Look at Puddlecombe for instance, as he sits with his great, broad, flabby face turned upwards as though in rapt attention. His lack-lustre eye brightens not as I triumphantly reach the culminating point of proof. I know better than to disturb that sweet serenity by any question anent the matter in hand. Too well I know that what little mind

is concealed within that massive cranium is miles away, at home probably among his birds, for Puddlecombe is a great fancier, and his rabbits and dogs and things worth a "fellow's" attention. What an extraordinary person he must think me, and how he must marvel (if he ever thinks at all) at the "shine Old Feeder kicks up" about such an uninteresting subject as the *Pons Asinorum*. And so there is thus much energy gone out of me—enough, we will say, if otherwise directed, to have dug a quarter of an acre of land or gone some way towards building a house or a steam-engine.

Ah! *Pons Asinorum*! in that melancholy procession that daily passes, or strives to pass, your narrow way, who are most to be pitied—the asses,

patient or recalcitrant, for whose benefit your piers were raised, or the breathless, hatless band of drivers, who, with cries and exhortations, and perchance with stripes, and with despair in their hearts, pull, coax, or drive their unwilling charges? How few reach the mysterious country on the other side, where, dimly seen, the dread forms of chord, arc, and hexagon, roam amid the tangled shade of demonstration and hypothesis. At first the sport is not unexciting. Amusement at the strange antics of some of the asinine troop is mingled with pleasure and pride when, after much kicking, biting, struggling, and perchance tearful braying, one or two of the more active among them triumphantly crosses by the narrow way.

But the fun soon flags, too soon the ass-master gets to think only of the dull, sluggish troop that lie wallowing in the mud on the hither side, or with forefeet firmly planted, and much flourishing of muscular hind legs, defy all influence of threat or entreaty.

So much energy then *in tenues evanuit auras*. And now I must change my class. Would that I could also change the subject of our studies! The Fourth Class, however, are more advanced, and there are one or two sharp boys in it, who can be trusted not always to outrage one's geometrical sensibilities.

At first, while these youths are learning, or trying to look as if they were learning, the 15th proposition, I

have leisure to meditate and listen to what is going on around me.

Strange how this afternoon atmosphere seems to affect all alike. Even the gentle Jones betrays a shade of acrimony in his mild expostulations. From a distant class-room I hear the steady continuous roaring of Bugsby, a monotonous din, even as it were of the stormy sea of compulsory instruction beating upon the adamantine rocks of Ignorance and Inattention.

Near me is the Reverend, who is endeavouring to conceal his obvious irritability under a mask of what seems to me something like buffoonery. "How ill grey hairs become a fool and jester!" There is a lack of calm dignity about the Reverend. He is not nearly Olympian enough

even for the headmaster of a preparatory school. Who would have cared for the bolts of Jove had their demission been accompanied by a wink or shake of the leg on the part of the Thunderer? The Reverend is always, either literally or metaphorically, winking. He labours under the mistaken impression that by posturing and grimacing he renders the Greek grammar, or whatever there is of drier in the studies of youth, more palatable, and that antics are a kind of roller to make rough places plain. It is his idea of making work interesting to boys. Another of his erroneous notions is to the effect that by reading over a translation, or even the original Greek or Latin of the lesson, in an impressive sing-song, one inspires lads of

twelve with a love for the trim paths of classical scholarship; and that, because he feels a thrill at a fine passage of Virgil or Homer, his class must do the same. But this is a very common form of illusion, and may be numbered among the "Day-dreams of the Schoolmaster," of which another has written eloquently.

Lulled by this concord of sweet sounds I am very near falling asleep; but suddenly discovering that the hour is more than half gone already, I rouse myself and plunge once more headlong into the maddening whirl of blunders, carelessness, stupidity, and ignorance.

Soon, however, the agony is over and the bell rings, which proves that the welcome hour of six has arrived. The boys are let loose for five minutes

into the dry playground, and a sort of pandemonium results. Part rush wildly about in the fantastic evolutions of "Touched last;" part keep up a sort of hail storm of fives and tennis balls; part loaf about with hands in pockets and talk in corners; but the greater number howl, scream, shout, laugh, bellow, tumble, cry, or whistle.

6 p.m.—*Tea*.—Six o'clock finds us all assembled at the festive board to despatch our somewhat frugal meal. The piece, or rather pieces of resistance, at this meal, as at breakfast, consist of bread and butter. The severe simplicity of this diet is, however, mitigated by slices of cold meat or the occasional egg or chop.

The liquor supplied, it is needless

to say, is tea, of various shades, varying from the undisguised milk-and-water tint of that in the cups of the rank and file, to the pale mahogany shade which the infusion exhibits when supplied to the usher.

The prevalence of this form of drink, especially in schools, often affords me subject for meditation. The wonder is not that this marvellous herb should have become popular throughout the Northern world. It were strange if it had not done so. But I marvel, first, that, though few people can resist the charm of a "good" cup of tea, so few should take the trouble to make it or get it made properly; secondly, that, as a beverage to be drunk at certain meals, it should have come to be thought well nigh

indispensable by all below the middle class, and by all school boys and their masters throughout this kingdom. Made weak, in large urns, as is usual at schools, it is little short of nauseous or sickly; while, if brewed of strength enough to tickle the palate, most doctors declare that it is more or less harmful to the nerves, and that, as a solvent in the process of digestion, it has very little value. Surely some more satisfactory beverage might easily be substituted. Even milk and water would be more wholesome and certainly not more unpalatable, especially to children.

From these meditations I am suddenly roused by a rap on the table. "Silence!" Bugsby is going to give out a notice. With what pomp and

circumstance doth Bugsby perform the simplest operations of daily life. The notice is merely to the effect that some money has been picked up, the owner whereof is invited to claim it. Bugsby delivers this address with all the magniloquence of an imperial ambassador. He loves to talk like a printed book. His sentences are so well formed that one almost suspects him of composing at his leisure a certain number to be delivered each day. Thus, where humbler ushers would speak of having "been at their last school for three years," Bugsby will grandly allude to having "terminated a three years' engagement." It is only under the influence of the strongest emotion that Bugsby is ever betrayed into slovenliness of diction, or sometimes, alas!

into the neglect of the long-suffering aspirate. He is a truly wonderful man, viewed in various aspects. His strong point no doubt is his "experience." Mounted high aloft on this hobby, he views with supreme and ill-disguised amusement all ways of dealing with boys which do not tally with his own. Is it not Oliver Wendell Holmes who speaks somewhere of "that solemn fowl experience, which cackles more often than she lays an egg?" Surely among schoolmasters "experience" is a hobby ridden to death. So far from being necessarily an advantage, the effect of experience on a man narrow-minded by nature or early training, and with a spice of obstinacy in his disposition, is only to narrow more and more his view of things and to produce

an entire belief in his own infallibility. He has come to regard the question of the management of boys as a sort of problem that can be worked out only in one way, and he has no confidence in a man who claims to have found any other method or solution. There are, I fear, only too few in whose case experience extends their toleration and causes them more and more each day to recognise the truth of the vulgar proverb concerning the many different ways of killing a cat. There are some again on whom experience has no effect whatever for good or ill. Yet, however unqualified these may be for their profession in other respects, this much at least in their favour—they can point to their experience, and none can deny it to them.

Thus musing I pass the festive hour of tea, only rousing myself at intervals to insist on points of good manners, or to protest against the more serious business of the hour being broken in upon by noisy conversation such as this:—

Gobbles—"I say, don't you wish they gave us jam?—they used to at my last school."

Gabbles—"Yes, by Jove! I say, Gobbles, which do you like best, strawberry or gooseberry?"

Gobbles—"Oh, strawberry of course—don't you?"

Squirt minor (reflectively)—"*I think green-gage is the jolliest.*"

Gobbles—"Shut up! who spoke to you, young Squirt?"

Gabbles—"I'll lick you afterwards,

young Squirt, if you don't hold your row."

Squirt (to Feebles, his neighbour)
—"I say, isn't Gobbles getting cocky?"

(General excitement).

Mr. Feeder—"Squirt, and Gobbles, and Gabbles, hold your tongues till tea is over."

Comparative quiet ensues, and presently Bugsby says grace, and we retire to take part in that last scene of all, "Evening School."

6.30 *p.m.*—*Evening School*.—Evening School at Coddlington House does not mean that the whole school is assembled in one room, engaged in preparation of work for the next day, and presided over by one master,

whose chief business it is to keep order. Other schools may countenance a trouble-saving system like this, but not such a well-regulated establishment as ours. Here each class goes to its appointed master, and is helped over all the stiles. No rough stones nor ugly briars are suffered to wound the tender feet or impede the toddling progress of our nurslings, as they traverse the pleasant plains of knowledge. So I sit down with Classes I. and II., and feel bound to answer the endless questions addressed me, more especially by Bogus *major*, Potter, and Flops.

At the next set of desks to mine Masherley is superintending the preparation of another class. What a contrast between Masherley and

Bugsby! With Bugsby it is always "school;" his one idea is "discipline;" his horizon is bounded by the four walls of his classroom; he snuffs the grammar-laden air thereof as a charger snuffs the breeze of battle; the scratching of pens is as the music of trumpets to the ears of the war horse; he revels in "impositions" as a steed in the flowery meadows; he pricks his ears at the sound of the cane; as a child his favourite playthings must have been rulers, inkpots, and sheets of blotting paper; the same suffice to amuse his middle age; he never, as it were, gets away from his profession, and the effort to maintain his dignity has become a habit with him. Masherley on the other hand, whatever may be his real aspirations,

always gives one the idea that he is doing it all for fun ; he is *par excellence* an amateur ; he despises method ; he is nothing if not unprofessional. Out of school he speaks of the whole thing as if it were a joke—as if he were playing at being a schoolmaster. Though he affects a seriousness before the boys, yet, like the augurs, he cannot catch a fellow-professor's eye without a strong inclination to wink or smile. With Masherley his dignity seems never to be consciously maintained ; yet he seldom does an undignified thing, and the boys seem less inclined to take liberties with him than with most men. The secret of this is that Masherley is a thorough gentleman, and has plenty of self-respect without that over-anxious self-asser-

tion which marks the man of inferior breeding. Self-respect again leads him to dress himself well. The professional shabbiness of ushers disgusts him. He is, to say truth, a bit of a lady-killer, and in appearance is a very proper man. His trousers and boots especially show signs of the loving care he bestows upon them. It is characteristic of Masherley that in school, when not actually engaged in teaching, he is for ever writing letters. He is doing so now while I watch him; and, as he writes, he smiles to himself in a pre-occupied manner; he is evidently putting down something funny. Meanwhile his class, seeing his pre-occupation, are not so industrious as they might be. Little Baggs and Bendigo, in the back row, are

amusing themselves with some paper game, and several others are doing anything but work. Now I am powerless to interfere, because the etiquette of ushers forbids me to reprove these idlers, when under another man's care, even though, as in the present instance, they are quietly playing within a few yards of me; and the rascals know it. Again, if I were to go and advise Masherley of his boys' shortcomings, he would (unreasonable as it may seem) be wroth with me. So I am forced to let it alone. What a foolish thing is this jealousy which, I suspect, affects all men far more than they care to confess. Especially it is rife in small communities such as ours. If "two of a trade can never agree," what about half-a-dozen men of the

same profession, who are unavoidably brought together daily for three months at a stretch? A is jealous of B, and C, and D; B is jealous of A, and C, and D, &c., &c. Very often even the great X, the headmaster, is jealous of all the rest. Speaking from my own experience, I always feel a pang when one of my colleagues informs me that some idle, stupid, or recalcitrant person, on whom I never succeeded in making an impression, is "doing very well with him." It may be much better for the boy that he should leave me, and his departure may have been the greatest blessing to me—but I don't like it. At the same time, I have no doubt that the colleague in question feels a corresponding pleasure at being able to give me the informa-

tion. And so on, and so on. We are always treading on each other's toes, and pretending, out of pride, that it doesn't hurt. If pride, however, be wanting, or the stamp be too heavy, there come snappings and snarlings, and sometimes open quarrels. Bugsby has not much pride of this kind.

It is just the dread of arousing any feeling of this kind that prevents me from drawing Masherley's attention to the improper behaviour of Baggs and Bendigo. Poor little beggars! they'll be caught soon enough, no doubt.

One of the boys in that class is working hard enough at anyrate. That is little Essex, our model boy. He is pegging away at his Greek verbs as if his life depended on it. What a delightful little lad it is. He is very

big for his age, and has a frank handsome face, the best feature in which is a pair of grave, finely-set grey eyes. He is not one of your little curly-headed, soft, spoiled, mamma's darlings. If anything, he resents petting, though never in an offensive way, and is as forward for his age in games as he is at school work. He is a brave, honest lad, "with no humbug about him;" with plenty of sturdy independence of character, but not a touch of impudence, and blessed with a wonderful evenness of temper. He is a boy who looks one straight in the face, and would not dream of lying. He is the beau-ideal of an English schoolboy: would that all were like him. Poor lad! I wonder how long his conscience will remain as clear as it must be now?

Even Bugsby, perhaps involuntarily, softens in his manner towards Essex. Perhaps he thinks him a less irreclaimable beast than most in this menagerie.

Masherley signs his name with a masterly flourish, and, with pen in his mouth, proceeds to fold and direct his third letter. Baggs & Co. have been quick to detect these signs of danger, and by the time Masherley casts his eagle eye upon them, his class are to all outward seeming busily intent upon their work.

Twenty minutes more. This hour is passing very slowly. I must try to get some amusement from these shelves behind me, on which our youngsters are allowed to keep their "play books." What a dreary collection they are, at least to an adult. Most of them are

books with a horribly obvious moral, presented to the little dears chiefly by fond mammas and aunties. Is it much to be regretted that little boys usually extract what amusement they can from the story and miss the moral? It is not that, like us hardened oldsters, they scent a moral lesson afar off, and, impatient of instruction, fly the commonplace conveyed. It is simply that they pass it by. It is an institution, like a sermon; it exists, but they don't realize that it concerns them—Here they are in rows, these goody books, bound for the most part in cloth of a seductive brilliance, and printed on very smooth paper in very big type. H'm! "Willy's Mistake; or, Ran away to Sea" (and was sorry for it). "Will he win?" (of course he

will), "or, Boys at St. Benedict's"—obviously the story of a good boy's triumph. There he is in the very first illustration, in irreproachable trousers and a nice turn-down collar; he is evidently refusing to take part in some desperate wickedness planned and proposed by The Naughty Boy, who, at the head of his schoolfellows, is openly scoffing.

Here are also a few more readable books by popular writers of tales for boys: they bear more alluring titles, such as, "The Head-hunters; a Tale of Borneo," and "Life at Sea; or, From Boatswain's Mate to Port Admiral."

Perhaps the most amusing books in the collection are several volumes of boys' magazines of various kinds. Here we find the most astonishing

tales, full of thrilling incidents and surprising adventures, on which the changes are rung on pirates, cannibals, crocodiles, caves, serpents, desert islands, tomahawks, and scalps. Here too are pages of cryptograms and acrostics and mysterious pictorial puzzles: directions for making everything, from fireworks to organs, and suggestions for experiments, which recall *Punch's* comic advertisement of "one hundred ways of making uncle jump."

And now the bell rings for prayers, and after we have attended duly at this final ceremony, there is a general taking of greatcoats and umbrellas; the boys are handed over to the tender care of Bugsby for the night, and we disperse to our various lodgings.

8.0 p.m.—*Peace at last!*—How pleasant my modest lodging looks after a long day of wearisome and worrying work. The fire burns cheerily; my clock ticks welcome; there stands my easy-chair with open arms to receive my languid limbs. Not far distant lie my well-polished pipes, and near them their intimate friend Tobacco Jar. How cosy my dearly-beloved books look in their red, and green, and russet covers, neatly arranged on their morocco-edged shelves. Quick, a pipe! Ah! I'm not sure that it is not worth while to work at disagreeable tasks all day in order to enjoy such sensations as these. Fancy what a dull little den this would seem if I had been at leisure for the last ten hours, and missed the contrast. Is it positive pleasure, or

only a negative state of freedom from annoyance? Well I'm too sleepy to philosophize to-night. Hallo! Nearly off! One great drawback to the solitary usher's life is that his mind gets concentrated on the one subject of boys. Boys, boys, past, present, and to come; the horizon is bounded by boys. Luckily, I do not dislike boys, and can generally think kindly of them, especially at a distance.

What a wide difference though there is between boys at our nursery schools and the same creatures when they have attained to a maturer age, and are no longer under the care of the usher proper. The latter may be called an entirely new species; they require new dens and a new kind of keeper. I will give a boy two years to complete

the metamorphosis. Many of our boys naturally migrate from here to the neighbouring Public School of Muddleborough, and of course occasionally return to visit the familiar scenes of—I had almost said—their childhood. But what a change! I know them not. These are, on examination, unimproved elongations of my former young friends. What mean these stand-up collars, these budding whiskers, this tinge of—“swagger?” A distance has inserted itself between us. They are half proud, half shy; and I myself must confess to a feeling of considerable awkwardness. I try my best jokes (at which they used to laugh heartily two years ago), but they somehow fall flat, and the mirth, if any, is forced. I feel that they have found me out. I am

great and wise and good no longer in their eyes. They have tasted the fruit of knowledge, and know that I am, metaphorically speaking, naked.

Looking back through my years of usherhood, how many bright little fellows I remember, once on a time my favourite pupils, who have dropped entirely out of sight. I haven't even the satisfaction of thinking that they still exist somewhere. Only in the memories of fond parents and kindly pedagogues are their eidolons still preserved. No, no ; I know too well into what they have changed. Where is Tommy Smart, the cleverest boy in the school, who took the scholarship at Eton, and whom we were so sorry to lose ? Where is Johnny Jumper, the pillar of our eleven, the swift

runner, the invincible on the field of football? What is gone of Charlie Goodchild, who, though so backward at work and play, yet managed to be a favourite with boys and masters? Unfortunately the answer is plain enough. They have all entered upon that disagreeable period of transition, which comes between the age of 14 and 20, more or less. They are all hobbledehoyes of one sort or another. They have either joined the ranks of the hobbledehoyes proper—awkward shy, lean, overgrown, short-trousered—or they have turned to prigs, big with the dawning thought that holes may be picked in the good old-fashioned boyish creeds, and with an ill-concealed suspicion that they are “wiser than the aged.” Lastly, I fear that

some of them—I hope but few—have become “men about school,” knowing in the matter of tailors and boot-makers, surreptitious smokers of cigars, with a distaste for boyish pastimes, having their minds unhealthily developed in undesirable directions.

And so we ushers watch them year by year, and teach them, and fancy we gain some influence over them for good; and then the end of their sojourn comes, and they go out into their public school (which is to our life what the greater world is to that of Eton and Harrow), and we see them no more, or only in a changed and unfamiliar form. Not that the change is necessarily for the worse, but there it is. The relations between us are entirely altered; the grub has

become the butterfly; the kitten has lost its kitten-like ways and forgotten us; the puppy has advanced on his awkward way to doghood, and has gotten him another master.

11.0 p.m.—*In Bed.*—And now for my well-earned repose. Alas! Only too soon it will be to-morrow. I often find myself at this particular hour muttering the remark made by one of the Spirits, and overheard by the Ancient Mariner—

Quoth he, "The man hath penance done,
And penance more will do!"



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